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ABSTRACT

In the past 2 decades, the United States has had a more troubled experience in establishing common standards and decentralized authority than comparable school systems in other cultures. This paper describes how the National Center for Education and Economy (NCEE) has been working through the National Alliance (NA) for Restructuring Education to create standards-based systems that support high student performance. The NA approach to systemic reform has been implemented in four major states (Arkansas, Kentucky, Vermont, and Washington) and in five school districts. The paper summarizes outcomes of NA systemic reform at the state, district, and site levels. The findings show that common, systemic, real performance standards aligned with assessment and accountability are essential. The NA experience demonstrates that: (1) Student performance standards must be real; (2) the concept of student performance standards alone is insufficient; (3) viable student performance standards do not get invented from the bottom-up; (4) a single set of student performance standards helps to focus efforts; (5) combined student and school accountability enhances student involvement; and (6) performance assessment must be linked to the standards but must also be valid and reliable. The NA effort to create high-performance management organizations that link systems and local schools has also led to a set of important lessons about school reform: design systemic reform at several organizational levels; district-level reform without state systemic support and alignment was very tough; school leaders reported positive impact of clear and common standards on the school-change process and commitment of school leadership to the process; decentralization of authority enhanced the impact of common standards on classroom practice; and standards-driven reform created a new form of school leadership and change process. Five tables are included. (Contains 33 references.) (LMI)

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SCHOOL REFORM AND DECENTRALIZATION IN THE UNITED STATES
THE NATIONAL ALLIANCE EXPERIENCE

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A paper presented in the symposium on education reform and school decentralization: results from three countries at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association in Chicago in March, 1997.

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Background

In the next decade, educational reform as seen across national boundaries is likely to have several common themes. First, student performance standards for student results are increasingly going to be defined and assessed at the system level, with dramatically improved technology for assessing important student performance (Caldwell and Spinks, 1992; Odden, 1995). An OECD publication, Performance standards in education: In search of quality (1995) describes efforts to establish system-wide student performance standards in Europe, North America, and Asia. The report describes international variations on themes related to establishing standards, the types of standards to be used, valid and appropriate assessment strategies for monitoring the standards, and policy regarding cost, consistency, and fairness. One is struck by a common message: systemwide standards for student performance coupled with fair and powerful assessments strategies are clearly a major priority and developmental theme across these countries. Within the United States, there are not only massive efforts to establish student standards and assessment systems, but also strong public support for standards-driven reform (Rose and Gallup, 1996).

Second, customer satisfaction will matter more as competition for students increases and the option of choice becomes more prevalent (Caldwell, 1996). Customer satisfaction and school performance will become more synergistic because of societal trends common across countries, because customers care about student performance, and because the value a school adds to student performance will matter more than it has before to customers. Of course, customers will continue to care about other dimensions of school quality: parents care about a safe and supportive environment for their student, and universities and employers care what students know and are able to do after leaving the school.

Third, the shift from a rule-driven to a results-driven system where local schools have much greater authority and control of resources, within a framework worked out at the system level, will intensify. This shift will continue the expansion of leadership roles and organizational support needed within the school, create a very different culture, and value much different views of expertise and

collaboration. Odden (1995) reports that the trend toward centralization of system purposes and decentralization of the means to get there is common across business organizations and governmental agencies, including education. Lawler (1992), Odden (1995) and Mohrman and Wohlstetter (1994) have identified important ingredients of a high performance organization that must be decentralized in order for front line workers to carry out the ongoing improvements needed to reach system targets. These critical ingredients include power to control resources and personnel, knowledge, information and rewards for performance success. Odden and Kelley (1997) have refined the rewards dimension in terms of teacher compensation strategies appropriate in high performance organizations in education.

Fourth, after years of inertia, teaching and learning will change in truly revolutionary ways. The push for "value-added" schooling and much higher student performance for all students will force schools to dramatically change the way teaching and learning take place. Enhanced clarity about student performance standards and improved assessment technology will act both to prod schools and to finally provide the assessment support needed to clarify how students are doing. At the same time, new approaches to curriculum design linked to the standards, stronger efforts at finding "best" instructional practices by using bench marking in an international context, and powerful uses of technology that enhance school learning and link it to the resources of the learning society will become dominant. These new approaches to assessment, curriculum and instruction/technology will only be successful if the school restructuring and reculturing happens as implied above.

Finally, the next decade will also be characterized by global political, economic and social issues of stunning complexity and tenacity. These issues will evolve with rapid speed, and are likely to accelerate the reshaping of schools themselves as well as the world "beyond" the school. Schools are likely to have new strategic partnerships with families and community agencies characterized by new approaches to incentives and accountability, and shared but limited resources (see Tucker and Codding, in press; Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1995). Responding to these global issues will be a particular challenge for American schools.

Common standards and decentralized authority in the U.S.: A troubled past

In the past two decades, the U.S. has had a more troubled experience in establishing common standards and decentralized authority than comparable school systems in other countries. Baker and Linn (1995) describe the U.S. effort to establish common standards in contrast to the experience from other countries, and McLaughlin and Shepard (1995) describe the struggles to establish national standards and the many dilemmas involved in having common performance standards for American students. In short, common standards and assessment in the United States are typically not aligned with traditional curriculum and are not in place in many school districts across the country, even though professional standards have been established (McLaughlin and Shepard, 1995). At present, common standards are not the focus of schools or students, nor are there high stakes for student performance for students or schools (Baker and Linn, 1995). Finally, common standards are typically at odds with tradition-driven assessment systems and create turbulence for school reform (Mitchell, 1996; Murphy, 1994).

Decentralized authority has also experienced a troubled past in the United States. Malen, Ogawa and Kranz (1990) document how in the U.S., decentralized authority typically has not given legitimate new responsibilities to school teams. David (1994) clarifies this dilemma by contrasting the intent of site-based management (improved curriculum and instruction, improved decision-making at the schools, improved leadership at the school, and improved student performance) with the reality of these changes. In short, she found that site-based management heretofore had improved the life of adults at the school, while not improving the life of students. Wohlstetter and Odden (1992) and Mohrman and Wohlstetter (1994) synthesize and confirm these conclusions. In turn, new ideas of high performance organizations building on the work of Lawler (1992) offer considerable more hope for site-based management in the context of system performance standards for students.

One major reform effort in the United States appears to be making considerable progress in establishing the two policy dimensions that are the focus of this symposium: common high performance

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standards for students, and decentralized authority to schools to enable them to find fresh and powerful strategies to help all students reach those high performance standards. This major reform effort, spearheaded by the National Center for Education and the Economy (NCEE), has been in the forefront of the efforts to establish common standards for student performance through the New Standards effort led by Lauren Resnick and Marc Tucker.

At the same time, NCEE through the National Alliance has been working with states and districts that collectively serve almost 25% of the student population in the United States to create standards-driven systems that support high student performance. Elements of the NCEE reform approach include a performance-based student assessment system tied to the New Standards Project, transformed curriculum and instruction and a new approach to school design that is linked to the standards, a high performance orientation to system and school management that supports high student achievement, and a new partnership with parents and the community so that all students can reach high performance.

The work of the NCEE provides an important opportunity to understand the ways that common student performance standards and decentralized authority have been implemented in the American setting to date. Consequently, the purpose of this paper is to report the results of studies designed to:

- Describe the intent of the National Alliance regarding common standards for student performance and decentralized authority, and highlight the settings where the National Alliance is working
- Examine the extent to which these reforms elements have actually been implemented and their impact on systems and local practice
- Provide a set of grounded lessons about the design and implementation of common standards and decentralized authority in the American context

Description of the National Alliance

At the time of the study, the National Alliance for Restructuring Education had been hard at work in four major states and five school districts creating a systemic reform that helps all students reach high performance levels. The National Alliance (NA) agenda for reform has been organized around five

design tasks to accomplish needed reforms in American schools: standards and assessment, learning environment (including new school-to-work and technology), public engagement, community services and supports, and high performance management. This undertaking is both broad in its conception of reform and in the complexity and size of the jurisdictions that the NA is working with (Tucker 1994abc; Tucker and Codding, 1995; in press).

These five design tasks provide the horizontal dimension of reform. But there is also a vertical dimension—it extends from the schools through the district and community to the state. In the NA view, district and state structures and policies must change radically to ensure that large numbers of schools, not just a relative few, routinely produce high levels of student performance. Only if the goals, policy structures, and practices of these three levels of government are mutually reinforcing can the job be done. Therefore, the NA is unique among NASDC design teams in its focus on all levels of the education system: school, district, and state.

The organization of the NA reflect these vertical and horizontal dimensions of reform. In Phase Two of the NASDC reform, the NA worked with four states—Arkansas, Kentucky, Vermont and Washington—and three districts—Pittsburgh, Rochester, and San Diego. Where an entire state committed as a NA partner, the NA worked with several districts to implement the NA view of reform. The NA partners, moreover, represent a diverse group of schools and sites—urban, suburban, and rural—with a broad range of student populations.

In Phase I, the Alliance worked with twelve schools in three jurisdictions: three in Kentucky, three in Vermont, and six in Rochester. In Phase II, the NA added an additional forty-four schools: three in Arkansas, twelve more in Kentucky, four in Pittsburgh, six more in Rochester, five in San Diego, nine more in Vermont, eight in Washington State, and two in White Plains. These schools represent a broad range of social, economic, and school conditions—urban, suburban and rural, from preschool to high school.

To keep the spotlight on school-level work, eight schools were selected as demonstration schools. This subset of 3 elementary, 4 middle and 1 high schools represents a range of social, economic, and school conditions from Rochester, San Diego, Vermont, Kentucky, and Washington State that is reflective of the context in which the NA is working on a national level.

Within the school, district, and state levels in each of these jurisdictions, the NA has organized itself to help ensure that all of the design tasks were addressed and implemented effectively. At the school level, each school designated a leadership team, whose members were responsible for each design task. These team members became the school's representatives to NA workshops and conferences. The school leads, in turn, designated network leaders who would be responsible for the program at the district level. A site coordinator supervised the program at the jurisdiction level.

Research Methodology

This paper is based on three studies of the NA conducted by the internal evaluation team. The first is an in-depth case study of the high-performance management strategies being undertaken by the NA. The case study focuses on Edmonton, Alberta in Canada, which has served as the model of high-performance and decentralized authority as used in the NA. The case study was conducted by an on-site team of four people, who had intense and lengthy interviews with district and school leaders at elementary, middle and high schools. In addition, documents were carefully reviewed and cross-checked against the interviews. The case study and methodology for the case are described in Marsh (1995).

In that same year, Marsh and Tacheny (1995) conducted an evaluation of the overall NA reform effort which addressed five major components:

- The state-wide reform effort
- The district restructuring effort
- The roll-out effort

- The extent of implementation at the school level
- Baseline data and analysis of the student performance system

The third internal evaluation is an ongoing study of school leadership teams and reform implementation at the school level.

In addition, the RAND Corporation is conducting a major evaluation of all New American Schools design teams, including the NA. This paper draws on two reports from the RAND study of New American Schools. The first, Bodilly (1996), captures the purpose, approach, and history of the New American Schools initiative, and provides data about essential characteristics and differences among design teams, their relative progress toward implementation, the assistance strategies used by the NASDC design teams, and their effect on progress. The second, Mitchell (1996), explores principal's perceptions of school accountability systems and their impact on classroom practice, school-based assessment, and design implementation.

Edmonton, Alberta: A Promising Approach to District Restructuring

According to Marsh (1995), Edmonton, Alberta represents one of the most interesting and unique approaches to restructuring of any school district in North America. The restructuring approach of the Edmonton Public Schools System, which has approximately 76,000 students and 200 K-12 schools in the district, was built on a district-wide educational foundation that advocates what students should learn, how success in the district should be assessed, and how the restructuring effort should be organized.

The Edmonton model was based on eleven key themes that fall into three broad areas: (1) the general approach to restructuring; (2) the role of the school; and (3) the role of the central office (Marsh, 1995). More specifically, the Edmonton model can be summarized as eleven key themes, as follows:

Theme 1: The district has established clear and powerful goals for education and guiding principles for management processes in the district. These constitute the core values of the district and actively guide many types of decisions.

According to Marsh (1995), the policy documents began with a set of goals for both provincial schooling and education. These goals included: (a) developing competencies in reading, writing, speaking, listening and viewing; (b) acquiring basic knowledge, skills and attitudes in core subjects, referenced to national and international standards; (c) acquiring knowledge, skills, attitudes and habits which contribute to physical, mental and social well-being; (d) developing key attributes of good citizenship at local, national and international levels; and (e) acquiring the knowledge, skills, attitudes and habits required to respond to the opportunities and expectations of the working world.

The uniqueness of the Edmonton system was that the stated goals found in the policy document reflected the view that achievement of the broader goals of education was seen as a shared responsibility with the community stakeholders. Marsh (1995) states:

> They suggest that maximum learning occurs when the efforts and expectations of the various agencies which work with children complement each other. Community influences, among which the home is most important, must work with schools to develop key student characteristics such as intellectual curiosity, the ability to get along with people from diverse backgrounds, and a sense of community responsibility (p.2).

Marsh (1995) also indicated that the district established two complementary sets of guiding principles for its management processes which consisted of "criteria for implementation" of the district's strategic plan and its "principles of organization." These goals and principles for management, which were written and approved by the school board, focused the role of the district on a "result-oriented pathway."

Theme 2: There is a strong focus on results, established by the board of trustees of the district. Results focus on customer satisfaction and student performance. The district works hard to define results indicators and improvement targets, gather results data, and actively use this information to make decisions.

Marsh (1995) states: "the most distinctive theme in the Edmonton Public Schools is the strong focus on results" (p. 3). This "result-oriented" concept was a cornerstone of their educational philosophy and permeated every aspect of the district's operation. Marsh (1995) points out that EPS had a strong focus on customer satisfaction and quality and elicited input via annual surveys to allow central office

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staff, school site staff, and the community to rate their satisfaction with the district. The results of these surveys were then shared with the public and various stakeholders.

In recent years, EPS placed considerable emphasis on benchmark achievement exams for students. Benchmark exams were administered to students in years three, six, and nine in the four core subject areas to determine student performance levels in key knowledge, skills and attitudes. Marsh (1995) states: "Underlying this view of benchmarked student achievement is the idea that the curriculum should be synonymous with results expected of the student" (p. 3). According to Marsh (1995), curriculum was centralized as a district responsibility and instruction was decentralized as a school and teaching responsibility.

To help support schools with its emphasis on results, the district established an Office of Student Information and Monitoring. By gathering information and compiling reports, the district office provided critical information that allowed trustees to monitor priorities within a given school; principals to measure and evaluate satisfaction with district priorities; and central office staff to prepare plans and strategies to help improve schools.

Theme 3: Schools are held accountable for achieving district-defined results and are given considerable programmatic latitude, authority and resources for achieving results.

According to Marsh (1995), the EPS District developed an accountability model that established a "clear sense of direction" to schools. Underlying this district point of view was the belief that "accountability must come first and latitude must follow accountability." The district was not concerned with how or by what means the schools used to reach results. Only that schools gave highest priority to getting the job of education done by producing results. Further, the district assisted schools in defining what constitutes student results, but left schools to their own creative inventions on how to obtain these results. Lastly, EPS maximized financial resources at the site level by giving eighty-five percent of district financial resources to the schools (Marsh, 1995).

Theme 4: Authority for program design and resources allocation at the site level rests with the school principal, rather than a vaguely defined collaborative mechanism. Principals use a variety of means to engage colleagues and the community in decision making about program design and resources allocation in relation to the district-defined results areas.

One of the organizational features promoted by the EPS system was that the district believed that there should be a clear locus of authority at school sites. To this end, the principal was held accountable and had the authority for site program design and resource allocation to achieve the expected results as defined by the district. Despite the power granted to principals by the district, each school principal utilized a variety of strategies to engage staff and the community in decision making processes pertaining to school program design and resource allocation (Marsh, 1995).

Theme 5: Principals prepare annual school plans that set improvement targets in various results and link program design and resource allocation to these targets. School plans must be approved by the district and may involve negotiation about improvement targets between the principal and the district. Principals, however, are given considerable latitude in defining how resources are spent to achieve the desired results. Moreover, schools have incentives to generate additional resources and to succeed.

According to Marsh (1995), each year site principals developed school plans which were part of the district's annual budget process and the district-defined, result-oriented school improvement process. In the development of a site school plan, the school developed improvement targets for student learning and program operations. These improvement targets became the basis on which site principals negotiated with the district for additional educational funds.

One interesting feature that emerged in this system was that principals who designed innovative and unique programs that attracted additional financial support and resources to the school were able to retain those resources at the site. This policy provided sites with a major incentive to be innovative and efficient.

Theme 6: Principal's roles have expanded. Principals now act as instructional leaders with the resources and authority to provide overall direction for instruction, and they are accountable for achieving the improvement targets in the school plans.

In Edmonton, site principals viewed their role as expanded instructional leadership in which they could combine a district vision with the authority and resources to make results happen at their site. According to Marsh (1995), teachers reported feeling empowered under this arrangement because they had a principal with the authority to accept and implement creative ideas and proposals that could help enhance school performance results.

Theme 7: Teachers have many opportunities for professional development and leadership within the school. The new role of the principal enhances teacher involvement and efforts in many ways.

Teachers in EPS had many opportunities for professional development, improvement and leadership within the school and district. This was accomplished by the district diverting financial resources for professional development directly to the school site, where professional development services from the district or other sources could be purchased by teachers or by site principals. In addition, the district developed new leadership roles for teachers by creating teaching associates who were site curriculum development coordinators selected by the principal (Marsh, 1995).

Theme 8: The role of the central office is four fold: (a) to work with the board of trustees to set purposes and priorities; (b) to create results and indicators of success for approval by the board and to hold schools accountable for achieving student results; (c) to provide customer-driven service to schools in quasi-open market conditions; and (d) to manage the complex process that sustains this decentralized approach. The central office has an organization chart, planning process, resource allocation, and culture which support it four roles.

The most innovative component of the role of the central office in EPS was the shift of emphasis away from a "control" orientation to a "service" orientation to help schools achieve results. Marsh (1995) found that: "The central office (was) accountable for providing quality services to schools; the schools (were) responsible for achieving student learning results" (p. 8). In essence, the central office provided various services to schools and aggressively competed for school business in the open market place against other outside vendors. Such an arrangement has interesting ramifications as it pertains to the power relationship between schools and the district and the culture in which services are provided (Marsh, 1995).

Another innovative concept is the way in which the EPS district provided an organizational support structure for school principals. Under this structure, the district had seven regional associate superintendents who were responsible for approximately 30 schools each. Their primary function was to help mentor or coach school principals to achieve results, set improvement targets, assist in school plans, facilitate team planning, and provide a clear vision of district expectations (Marsh, 1995).

Theme 9: The district implements the overall design in pilot schools and is expanding restructuring to other schools in a systemic yet flexible way that includes multiple paths and learning from experience while emphasizing loyalty to district goals and guiding principles.

According to Marsh (1995), the EPS district embraced a strategy of change within its school system by developing pilot school test sites. This strategy allowed the district to concentrate its development resources on a small number of change schools and to learn from the experience. Thus far, the district has pilot tested in the following areas: core school restructuring, new maintenance procedure, and a new purchasing procedure.

As previously stated, the district used benchmarked achievement to define results. The district did not impose sanctions on non-performing schools, but instead, either changed the school principal or provided additional financial resources to the school that needed help.

Theme 10: The central office works hard to identify, develop and retain good principals, and to replace ineffective principals.

According to Marsh (1995), EPS worked hard to identify, develop and hire effective principals. The district provided workshops designed to acquaint district personnel with prospects and modified its principal career path by accelerating the careers of promising prospective principals. As previously mentioned in theme eight, seven regional associate superintendents were responsible for mentorship and coaching site principals. Since principal effectiveness was a priority within the district, district line administrators were asked to rank principals within their region and to justify their rankings. Careful attention was given to supporting good principals and replacing weaker ones.

For the NA, the high performance management strategies found in Edmonton formed the basis for designing statewide and district reform efforts within the NA. For our evaluation team, the Edmonton high performance management themes were the basis for our analysis of these NA efforts, which is the next section of this paper.

The Statewide Reform Effort

Overview

This section of the paper provides a summary of NA systemic reform at the state level. It provides a brief description of the NA's influence shaping policy in each of these states, provides an analysis of the impact of these state-level reform efforts, elements of the reform, and concludes with a set of "lessons learned" about our systemic reform efforts—which types of policies have been most helpful, which change process factors have been most important.

Highlights

- The NA states have established as statewide policy many elements of the systemic reform agenda.
- Policies that have moved beyond the planning stage and are now being implemented in a significant way include: student performance outcomes, school-level accountability, integration of comprehensive social services and public engagement.
- In addition, policies that are being seriously considered for statewide enactment include: the Certificate of Initial Mastery, devolution of authority and resources to schools to enable them to meet common student performance standards, and district accountability for results.
- In all states, the reform centered around student performance standards and performance assessment, a focus that was enshrined in comprehensive legislation.
- The NA had a significant influence on the legislation in all the states.
- Three key themes that emerged from the experience in all the states are: the essential collaboration between top-down support and bottom-up reform, the vital role of public engagement, and the tension between fast movement and the feasibility of new strategies, particularly performance assessment. The states' experiences provide positive and important lessons about all of these themes.

- In at least two states, state-level policies have had substantial and positive statewide impact on the local implementation of a results-focused standards and assessment system, and on the local learning environments.

- State policy levers have had the greatest impact on local practice in one state (Kentucky) and in the collaborative practice in another (Vermont). In two states (Washington, Arkansas), recently enacted comprehensive legislation creates real potential for local impact in the near future.

- Except for Kentucky, state policies to date have not had an impact on district/school restructuring of resources and authority, even though other states are considering similar policy efforts in these areas.

Methodology

Four states actively participated at the state level in the NA reform effort. The evaluation staff reviewed policy documents regarding systemic reform from the NA and developed an interview guide which had four sections: extent of implementation of state policies consistent with the NA agenda, major innovations that supported the state-level reform, lessons learned, and state impact on local practice. A telephone interview was set up with an informant from each state who was knowledgeable about the state's progress and who was actively involved in crafting the NA agenda.

Interviews were also conducted to assess the NA's influence in the actual implementation of reform legislation in each of the four states. Marsh and Tacheny (1995) describe the methodology in greater detail.

Findings

Extent of implementation of state policies. Marsh and Tacheny (1995) describe the extent to which states have been able to implement systemic reform agendas that support the NA agenda. In general, many elements of the systemic reform have been established as statewide policy in the NA states. Marsh and Tacheny (1995) report that three states have adopted legislation and are beginning to implement a policy at the heart of the NA reform effort: creating student performance outcomes and expectations. Moreover, at least two states have enacted legislation and/or formal policy and are beginning to implement related policies that include establishing system performance goals, creating a

statewide performance assessment system, establishing curriculum frameworks/guidance systems, and establishing instructional material support strategies that fit with the NA view. Kentucky led the way in establishing statewide performance goals for schools, and two other states are actively designing performance-driven systems.

State-wide assessment. States are using a variety of strategies to establish a statewide performance assessment system in core curriculum areas. Kentucky has emphasized both reference exams and portfolios within a statewide design. Vermont, however, has focused on portfolio assessment using generic rubrics that emphasize an interdisciplinary core curriculum. Washington and Arkansas, where recently passed legislation has mandated a performance assessment system, are proceeding to design performance assessment and portfolio systems that will be implemented in the next few years.

Standards for content and performance. All the states use the emerging national content and performance standards as the basis for their performance assessment systems. Even in states that are using curriculum frameworks, these clearly are being subsumed under the performance standards. This strategy is in contrast to that used in California, where the state began with curriculum frameworks and the assessment system emerged years later (and quickly disintegrated). Leaders from several states have commented that the curriculum frameworks were not as important as they once were thought to be, given the establishment of performance standards and the performance assessment system. The two states that have made the most progress in using an instructional guidance (Kentucky and Vermont) have also made extensive use of professional development that fit with their student and system performance goals. Successful states also made considerable use of school-level strategic planning and change processes aligned with state goals. This allowed schools to respond flexibly and to fashion their own change strategy to meet statewide performance standards.

The Certificate of Initial Mastery (CIM) was a central component of the standards and assessment design task. The CIM builds on what we have learned from international exit examinations, but also makes some important departures. The CIM is standards-based and aims to honor all students

who can meet those standards. In this way, the CIM provides greater rather than limited opportunity for all students. The CIM has been established as statewide policy in Washington and is being actively considered in Vermont. In these cases, state leadership is working collaboratively with local educators to design the system. The creation of the system in these states is posing interesting design issues. In Vermont, for example, some have noted that the subject-matter-specific focus may conflict with the state's emphasis on interdisciplinary activity. In addition, there is concern about CIM's role vis-a-vis the high school diploma.

School-level accountability. In several states, the role of the school district in holding schools accountable for results while devolving authority and resources to the schools has been a complex issue. No state has been an exemplary model of how this restructuring could be carried out. The NA is currently looking to the Edmonton, Alberta, school district for insight about how to carry out district/school restructuring that is results-oriented. Key superintendents from participating states were involved in a National Academy for District/School Restructuring, which held its first session in Edmonton in mid-April.

Impact on local practice. The extent of the impact of state policies in these four states is presented in Table 1. In at least two states, state-level policies have had substantial and positive statewide impact on the local implementation of a results-focused standards and assessment system, and on the local learning environment. This impact is seen not only in NA lead schools, but in many other schools in districts across the states. The level of implementation in these other schools and districts is limited today because the enabling legislation passed only recently. The impact of this work has been substantial in that it has shaped the direction in which schools are moving.

Table 1
Impact of State Policies

Impact Area	Extent of Impact			
	AK	KY	VT	WA
1. Extent of impact on local implementation of a results-focused, standards and assessment, using a NA perspective	1	4	3	3
2. Extent of impact on local learning environment conditions, using NA perspective	1	3	4	1
3. Extent of impact on systemic restructuring at district level—governance, resource redeployment	1	3	0	0
4. Extent of impact on systemic restructuring at school level—governance, resource redeployment	1	4	1	0
5. Extent of impact on actual results depicted in the NA result indicators	0	4	2	1

Key: 5 = Extensive Impact 0 = No Impact

State policies have also had an impact on the local learning environment, especially because performance assessment engages teachers in its development and implementation. Portfolio assessments in Vermont have been the major vehicle for professional development and collaboration in the state-the impact has been substantial. In Kentucky, the KIRIS performance assessment strategy has also had substantial impact on school-wide planning and allocation of resources by school-based management councils. Kentucky's state policies also have had a substantial impact on systemic restructuring at the school level, including governance and resource redeployment. Two other states are actively considering legislation that would lead to this level of impact at the school level. The extent of impact on actual student results can be seen vividly in Kentucky, highlighted by a 20 percent gain in student achievement over four years. (Kentucky Department of Education, 1995). All states are improving their indicator and assessment systems that would allow for this possible impact to actually be assessed.

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Implications

Lessons learned. All the states offer positive, important lessons about the way top-down support can enhance bottom-up reform, the need for public engagement and the tension between fast movement and the feasibility of performance assessment strategies. Three of the states talked about the importance of moving quickly by creating new structures outside the state department that allow statewide discussion and engagement in creating student performance standards. Yet, while they were interested in moving fast, the states recognized that performance assessment is an evolving technology and that the standards are only just being created. The early experience in Vermont (highlighted by a RAND report—see Koretz, Stecher, Klein and McCaffrey, 1994) underscored the problem of reliably measuring authentic student performance.. Even though teachers were learning a great deal by using portfolios, there was a need to create more reliable assessment measures as the basis for summary assessment of student progress. Kentucky has had a similar experience, and is a good example of a state that has moved fast while staying within the bounds of its technical assessment capability.

Importance of State-level Change. State leaders in all four states reported the importance of having a state policy framework that supports systemic reform. These findings support the idea that such a framework can be successfully established, and that the policy indeed makes an impact on local practice. The success of these frameworks rests in their focus on student performance and strong public engagement in creating the standards.

The District Restructuring Effort

Overview

An effort to restructure schools as part of the reform agenda will not be effective without a corresponding restructuring of the district operations and support systems. Districts and schools need to be aligned and integrated into a system in which each performs complementary functions in pursuit of a common end. As complex as restructuring schools may be, though, the restructuring of district operations poses numerous challenges that make the district-level effort even more formidable.

Change, at the best of times, is threatening. But when change encounters existing power in an established bureaucracy, many considerations other than high performance invariably impede the restructuring process. The obstacles in no way lessen the need for district-level restructuring; indeed, without this systemic restructuring, the school restructuring will not be effective.

This section will summarize the progress of NA districts in the restructuring needed to support school-level reform. Using the set of high performance management design principles drawn from the Edmonton case described above, Marsh and Tacheny (1995) examined which aspects of restructuring were most advanced, and compared and contrasted the views of this progress by local leaders and NA central staff.

Highlights

- Among the high performance management design principles, the districts appeared to have made the greatest progress toward developing the capacity of employees at all levels; the lowest progress was in achieving a focus on high standards and results.
- Districts which were further along in the reform process tended to rate themselves more critically than others, since they understood more clearly the magnitude of the work to be done. These districts were rated as high or higher by NA central staff.
- Districts which are beginning to consider implementing reforms tended to rate themselves highly, as they were less convinced that extensive changes were necessary. These districts were rated less highly by NA central staff.
- Districts' commitment to reform appears more advanced than plans and implementation, according to both district leaders and NA central staff ratings.

Methodology

Originally, a three-person team of visitors who would assess the extent to which the districts had implemented features of the high performance design principles was envisioned. Instead, it was decided to shift the responsibility for the ratings to the site leaders to strengthen the reflection and growth of their thinking. Consequently, a sample of seven large urban and suburban districts was chosen, including our district site-partners as well as districts from the state-wide jurisdictions. (Districts are shown as A through G in Table 3). In each instance, the Superintendent of Schools or a senior staff member

responded to the questionnaire about his or her district. Table 2 shows the average score for "implementation" for each design principle across all sites. Sub-scale scores for these principles, broken down by indicators and rated by commitment, plans and implementation, are represented in Marsh and Tacheny (1995). An average score for National Staff and Local Leaders' Ratings of Districts/School Restructuring is shown on Table 3. These ratings are labeled as local leader (LL) ratings in the tables. A lead senior national staff person for the NA (NS) also rated the extent of implementation in each district.

Findings

Over the three years, the NA agenda expanded from its initial emphasis on the schools to encompass the district operation as well. The need for district restructuring was increasingly accepted by district leadership. The restructuring initiative derived its impetus from a set of District/School Design Principles which had been developed by NA central staff with active participation of the site partners.

Qualitative Observations. The challenge for the NA national staff was to engage the district leadership in a commitment to effect the necessary changes. The commitment needed to be so deeply felt that the obstacles encountered did not deter leadership from following through in effecting a new partnership between the district and its schools.

Experiences of the past three years indicate that, in contrast to school restructuring, the district restructuring:

- follows school restructuring
- requires a deeper sense of commitment
- encounters more formidable obstacles
- requires the self-initiative of district leadership

This last aspect is important and often overlooked. It suggests that more attention needs to be given to engaging district leadership in activities so that they internalize the need for change, rather than view the reform as only satisfying an external requirement.

Extent of Implementation of Design Principles. Table 2 shows an aggregate score for all sites for each design principle. Across the districts, local leaders rated themselves highest for empowering employees and lowest for holding a common focus on standards and results.

Table 2
Aggregate Score Showing Progress on all Indicators

Design Principle	Average Score
1. Common High Standards and Results are the Focus	3.56
2. Systems are Fully Aligned to Support High Performing Schools	3.67
3. Continuous Learning Builds a Results-Oriented Culture	3.87
4. Authority and Increased Flexibility is Aligned with Accountability for Results	3.81
5. Authority and Accountability is Designated for Individuals and Groups	3.71
6. Invest in the Development of Employees at all Levels	4.13

Key: 5 = highest 1 = lowest 0 = disagree with applicability

Comparison of local leader and national staff ratings. Table 3 shows the ratings for NA central staff and local leaders for commitment, plans, and implementation and measures across the six design principles for the restructuring. NA central staff ratings parallel the trend of the site results with regards to commitment (3.9), plans (3.6), and implementation (3.1).

Table 3
A Summary of National Staff and Local Leaders Ratings of District/School Restructuring

	District A		District B		District C		District D		District E		District F		District G		Total
Stages of the Change Process	**NS**	**LL**	**NS**	**LL**	**NS**	**LL**	**NS**	**LL**	**NS**	**LL**	**NS**	**LL**	**NS**	**LL**	
Commitment	3	5.0	3	4.5	4	3.7	5	5.0	4	3.9	5	3.6	3	5	3.9
Planning	3	4.9	3	3.9	5	3.0	4	5.0	3	3.7	3	2.7	4	5	3.7
Implementation	3	4.5	2	2.6	4	2.9	4	3.7	3	3.6	4	1.6	2	5	3.1
Overall Assessment	3	4.8	2.7	3.7	4.3	3.2	4.3	4.6	3.3	3.7	4.0	2.6	3.0	5	3.6

Key: NS = Rating by National Staff
LL = Average of elements across all district/school restructuring elements as provided by local leaders

In general, the local leader rated the extent of implementation as being higher than did the NA central staff, but not always. Districts C and F were exceptions. The NA central staff rated the extent of implementation as being higher than did the local leader. Through interviews and ongoing work with these sites, it was noted that the further a district has progressed in the work of reform, the more critically its leaders rated their progress. This happens because as districts move through a restructuring process, they begin to understand more clearly the magnitude of the work to be done. Conversely, those districts that are only beginning to restructure tend to be most satisfied with the present state of affairs and rate their progress higher. Districts that are taking the first steps toward restructuring tend to focus with pride on their recent accomplishments, without understanding clearly the scope of the work to be done.

In summarizing the findings for district/school restructuring, one final pattern emerged that might prove interesting with further study. In our small sampling it was observed that the need for restructuring is perceived more acutely in urban than in suburban areas. More research is needed to watch this pattern to see if a defensible trend continues.

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The Extent of Implementation at the Site Level

Overview

The heart of reform happens at schools where students are learning. This section examines the extent of implementation of the NA design at the school level. To determine that extent, diagnostic checklists were used, which enable schools and the NA central staff to gauge progress in implementing each of the five design tasks. The process itself proved to be valuable to schools as an important tool for gathering baseline data on their own progress.

Highlights

- Most lead schools are in the planning phase regarding the use of student performance standards, which is in keeping with the progress of New Standards in establishing standards and assessment in core academic subjects and in applied learning.
- Most lead schools have made considerable progress in implementing key elements of the NA reform agenda.
- Local leaders and national staff perceive the extent of implementation in similar terms, and agree on the extensive progress that has been made.

Methodology

A set of eight lead schools were selected from across three jurisdictions that represented urban, suburban and rural elementary, middle and high schools. These schools are NA Demonstration Schools, where schools received modestly different attention and funding. While the reader may want to use caution in generalizing to all NA schools, Marsh and Tacheny (1995) feel the schools show the broad pattern of extent of implementation and helped to focus data collection efforts on lead schools. At each school, two respondent groups were used in the evaluation:

- The School Leadership Team: Each member of the team was asked to provide a personal assessment of the extent of implementation of each of the items, which then were discussed in a leadership team meeting.
- An NA Central Staff member

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For each item on the Evaluation Checklist, the School Leadership Team and NA Central Staff Member could rate the school's current position on any one of five points on a scale. For example: 1 = Not yet considered. Not addressed in strategic plan. No assignment of responsibility, no resources devoted. Not communicated to staff, community. Marsh and Tacheny (1995) describe similar anchors for the other 4 anchors on the 5 point scale in Table 4.

Table 4
Ratings of the Extent of Implementation of National Alliance Design Tasks in Demonstration Schools

No. of Schools at Each Stage of Implementation

Standards	**A**	**B**	**C**	**D**	**E**
The school has adopted the goal of getting all students, except the severely handicapped, to achieve the CIM.	1	6			1
The standards focus on teaching the knowledge and skills implicit in core subject matters.	1		1	3	3
Applied learning is incorporated into subject matter standards.	2		2	3	1
Performance standards are referenced to world-class standards, and are reflected in the school's mission.*	* 2	1		3	1
Assessment					
The school uses on-going performance assessment to capture students' knowledge and skills as reflected in the standards.*		1	1	4	1
The school has integrated the NSP portfolio assessment to assess student performance vis-a-vis the subject matter and applied learning standards.		2	6		
The school uses the NSP examination system in math, English/Language Arts, and science to validate local assessment findings.*	2	3	2		
Assessment data are used for gauging the success of the strategic plan.		3	1	3	1

Learning Environments: Curriculum and Instruction

The entire school program is organized to support all students in achieving high standards.			2	1	4
Student performance standards are the basis for articulating the district or school curriculum across the various grade levels.		3	3	1	3
Classroom instruction shows evidence that world-class standards set the criteria for content and process.*	1	1	1	3	1
The teachers see their role more as coach than as deliverer of the instructional program.			4	4	
A substantial body of high quality units of study (e.g., HELPS) serves as the basis for instruction in the core subject areas.		2	4	2	
Some substantial amount of instruction is embedded in project-based activity.			1	1	1

Learning Environments: School to Work

A governing partnership guides program planning efforts.			3	3	2
Professional development efforts are planned to enhance the integration of academic skills with applied learning and generic workplace skills and standards.			4	2	2
The applied learning performance standards are used to integrate academic learning across disciplines and connect the learning to students' experiences outside of school.		2	3	2	1
Students have the opportunity to explore different careers or workplace environments through a variety of activities.		2	3	2	1
Teachers are released to work with business/industry partners periodically each year for internships, job-shadowing experiences and/or curriculum development work.	5	2	1		

High Performance Management

A leadership team has been established by the school with the responsibility for the implementation of a specific design task and the team collectively ensures the integration of the work across design tasks.		1	1	2	4

The school has developed a three- to five-year strategic plan that reflects the following components:

School background/contextual information			2	2	4
School vision, mission and core beliefs			2	1	5
Desired results and performance targets		1	1	2	4
Design and implementation strategies			2	4	2
Timeline		2	1	1	4
Collaborative agreements	1		2	1	4
The school operates in a results-driven system (school, district or state) with clear results indicators, accountability and information flow.		2	1	4	1
The school has the flexibility and authority for decision-making and deploying the resources necessary to continuously improve student performance.	1			6	1
The school functions as a learning community where trust, collaboration, and risk-taking support continuous improvement.			1	5	2

Professional Development

All roles/people needed to make the reforms successful in the school are involved in ongoing and vigorous professional development.			2	3	3
Professional development grows out of a deep analysis of organizational and performance problems, and the school views capacity-building among all staff as key to school reform.			1	4	3
Professional development is focused on individual growth and organizational learning.			1	4	3
Professional development is targeted at each of the design tasks and at design task integration.			1	5	2
Professional development uses resources/ideas both from within and outside the school; it utilizes both local talent and national wisdom.				1	7
Professional development is carefully managed. It is characterized by considerable resources, time, leadership, appropriate tasks/timeliness and monitoring.			1	5	2

A = Not yet considered	B = Planning	C = Early implementation
D = Functional	E = Institutional	* = Schools did not provide data for an indicator

Findings

No longer Business as Usual. Responses to this self-assessment show that schools have made a real commitment to a standards-based system. Half of the schools, for example, indicated that they have made substantial progress in incorporating applied learning objectives into subject matter standards and that the performance standards are referenced to world-class standards and are reflected in the mission of the school. Moreover, all schools indicated that they had advanced in using ongoing performance assessment to capture students' complex knowledge and skills.

While there is evidence of firm commitment, standards show the widest variation in practice. This is to be expected. There are as many schools in "not yet considered" ratings for Standards items as there are schools that say they have institutionalized the task. Seven schools are in the planning stages, primarily regarding the Certificate of Initial Mastery. Some states and districts have well-developed standards, and schools in those jurisdictions are already affected by them. However, many jurisdictions have been waiting for New Standards to promulgate performance standards, which has just happened recently.

The data also show that most schools have redesigned their organization to support all students' learning at high levels, and that half the schools use standards to articulate the curriculum across grade levels and view teachers as coaches, rather than as deliverers of instruction. Yet, while many schools report progress in implementing the school-to-work agenda, few indicated that teachers are released to work with business-industry partners periodically each year for meaningful internships, job shadowing experiences and/or curriculum development work. More information is needed on what constituted progress.

Strategic progress for technology was an area that was new to many schools with the advent of the NA design. Now, seven out of eight schools say that they have established a vision and a plan for technology that goes beyond the availability of computers for student progress that ranged from the early stages of implementation to institutional. In addition, more than half of the schools reported early

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implementation of process-based on planning, shared with school management teams--to improve community services and that school staffs are aware of services available and refer students to them. Additionally, most schools have developed a leadership team and a long-range strategic plan, and all but one of the schools report that they have the flexibility and authority to make decisions and to allocate resources necessary for improving student achievement.

Reform priorities within schools. For each school, an average extent of implementation score was created for each of the reform elements examined on the diagnostic checklist. Table 5 shows these average implementation scores for each of the schools.

Table 5
Average Extent of Implementation Rating for Each Design Task in Demonstration Schools as Rated by Local Leaders
(Number of Schools=8)

School	Standards	Assessment	LE:C&I	LE:StW	LE:Tech	CSS	PubEng	HPM	Prof. Devel
A	2.50	1.75	2.66	2.60	4.33	3.50	2.66	3.16	3.33
B	1.25	2.75	2.66	2.80	3.16	4.50	1.33	2.83	4.16
C	2.75	3.25	3.66	2.60	3.44	3.16	2.83	3.50	4.16
D	3.50	2.50	3.66	3.40	3.50	3.16	2.00	3.83	4.50
E	4.00	3.25	4.16	3.80	3.83	2.83	3.83	4.66	5.00
F	3.75	4.00	3.50	4.20	2.66	2.66	3.83	4.16	4.66
G	3.50	3.25	4.50	2.80	3.27	3.50	3.00	4.33	4.16
J	2.50	3.00	3.16	2.80	4.55	3.00	3.00	4.33	4.00
total avg.	**2.99**	**2.97**	**3.50**	**3.13**	**3.59**	**3.29**	**2.81**	**3.85**	**4.25**

Key: 1 = Not yet considered 2 = Planning 3 = Early Implementation 4 = Functional 5 = Institutional

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There are several points of interest in this data. First, it is clear that most schools are at an early implementation stage for most aspects of the NA reform agenda. Second, the data also show that different schools have emphasized different elements of reform. For schools A and H, technology takes the lead in terms of degree of self-reported implementation. For school B, the most progress has been in the area of community support and services. For school G, curriculum and instruction has the highest average, followed closely by high performance management. And, for schools C, D, E, and F—half of the sampled schools—professional development is the self-reported area of greatest implementation.

Discrepancy analysis: What the schools and NA staff said. As was reported earlier, both the school faculty and an NA staff member familiar with the school rated the school's position on the five point scale for each item on the checklist. An analysis was conducted of the compared scores in six of the eight schools (data from two schools arrived too late to be included but it showed no indication of differing much from the earlier data).

Overall, the data show a remarkable degree of agreement between the schools and the NA Central Staff. Nearly all—92 percent—of the ratings were within one point of each other, and two thirds were exactly the same. A pattern emerged as to whether the NA rating was high or lower than the school's. This overwhelming level of agreement serves as a confirmation and validation of the school's own assessments. The NA staff person 5 rating acts as a validity check on the self-report of the school's ratings and provides them with a measure of robustness. In addition, the similarities are a measure of the staff's knowledge and awareness of the conditions in the schools with which they work. This is a healthy sign of what has occurred and what can continue as further work with these schools is undertaken. Finally, the strong similarities in the ratings reflect the growth of a set of shared values and understandings between staff and participating educators. They are a strong indication of the creation of a common culture—a NA culture—which is solid bedrock for future progress in restructuring.

Grounded Lessons

The studies of the National Alliance have lead to a set of grounded lessons related to the two policy themes of this symposia: common student performance standards and decentralized authority to schools. The lessons related to student performance can be summarized as: common, systemic, real performance standards aligned with assessment and accountability are essential. The more specific lessons related to this theme are:

1. Student performance standards must be real; just the concept of student performance standards won't do. The National Alliance has been very active through the New Standards project in developing a proposed set of student performance standards available for jurisdictions across the country. However, the actual document have only recently been released. Prior to that time, many National Alliance jurisdictions were "waiting for Godot" in that they wanted student performance standards, but they were not yet available. While jurisdictions could carry out some meaningful work in preparing for the use of standards, the availability of the standards documents themselves is crucial. Now that the standards and related assessments are available for use by jurisdictions, a new momentum for their use has been built. One good example of this is New York City and New York state where recent efforts at standards-based reform have been undertaken.

2. Viable student performance standards don't get invented bottom-up. Muncey (1994) and Muncey and McQuillan (1993) illustrate the many dilemmas when schools undertake efforts to establish school reform that is standards-focused and is invented at the local school level. For the bottom-up strategy, Marsh (1996) reports that it is difficult to find schools of over 500 students that have established standards that have been viable for at least 18 months and that are used school-wide. This is the sad state of affairs for inventing standards in a bottom-up approach. In contrast, the National Alliance has worked with jurisdictions in successfully establishing system-wide standards that have been widely used across schools and have been viable for several years. Kentucky is the best example in this regard.

3. A single set of student performance standards is very helpful. Once again, Kentucky is a good example of this as a positive case. In contrast, Pittsburgh has attempted to establish district-wide standards in a state context that has not been supportive of efforts of this type. Chicago, Pasadena, California, and San Diego, California, have operated with multiple sets of performance standards, which has led to considerable confusion both at the district and school level about student learning priorities. A single set of student performance standards helps; this is counter to the advice offered by McLaughlin and Shepard (1995) in their National Academy of Education report. As McLaughlin and Shepard correctly point out, the subject matter association standards were too extensive in number and uneven in quality. With the New Standards Project standards, and similar efforts by states like Virginia and Oregon, a more coherent and feasible set of standards can be established. Kentucky has shown that a single set of standards helps in focusing state-wide and local efforts toward student performance success.

4. Combined student and school accountability really helps. While Kentucky has had many of the other advantages of a common set of student performance standards established at a system level, they have recently become quite aware of the problem of poor student involvement in high performance student accomplishments. Other National Alliance jurisdictions are also becoming increasingly aware of the need to engage the student as well as the school in high performance student focus. Ironically, many countries in Western Europe and Asia have heightened student involvement by establishing a high school graduation based on student performance rather than the completion of student coursework. The National Alliance has proposed the Certificate of Initial Mastery as the U.S. version of this high performance high school graduation requirement. National Alliance jurisdictions and others have shown considerable interest in the CIM for many reasons, including its ability to combine student and school accountability.

5. Performance assessment must be linked to the standards, but also be valid and reliable. It must integrate system-wide and local teacher improvement efforts. In National Alliance settings, teacher-developed assessment that is not closely connected to system-wide standards and assessment strategies created hot spots of school improvement within a school, but rarely lead to school-wide or system-wide student improvement. Conversely, it is easy to see the advantages of an integrated system-wide and local improvement teacher-based assessment strategy in improving student learning.

Common, systemic and real performance standards positively empower local leadership in the change process, and lead to important changes at the classroom level. This effort to create high-performance management organizations that link systems and local schools have led to a set of important lessons about school reform:

1. Design systemic reform at several organizational levels. System design involves clarifying at the system level the performance results and accountability strategies, as well as identifying how power, knowledge, information and rewards will be decentralized to the school as part of the strategy for helping schools acquire the flexibility and authority to help all students reach high student performance standards. All NA sites wanted to have systemic reform that linked district reform to school-level reform, yet some NA sites proceeded with the change process as if getting autonomy to sites was the main objective. This often took the form of getting fiscal resources to the sites. More successful sites implemented the district and school level reforms in concert so that district standards and improvement targets were more readily available to sites, and decentralization of authority to schools worked closely with clearer district expectations.

2. District-level reform without state systemic support and alignment was very tough. The state support needed to have a technical dimension (clarity about standards and assessment, teacher credentialing and accountability linked to student performance results) but also a political dimension such as convergence about reform directions and stability of reform directions. Without such state-level support, districts like Pittsburgh, San Diego and school districts in the state of Washington were retarded in their reform work.

3. School leaders report positive impact of clear and common standards on the school change process and commitment of school leadership to this process. This finding is confirmed by Mitchell (1996) who found a similar pattern across schools involved in many of the NASDC design teams. NA principals report that common student performance standards created more local ownership of the instructional program, not less. The common standards also enhance local creativity in reaching those standards while allowing more local variation in school design.

4. Decentralization of authority enhanced the impact of common standards on classroom practice. In Chicago for example, common standards linked with common assessment tools and accountability proposals has led to dramatic changes in curriculum design, teacher deployment, professional development and school designs. Kentucky schools initially used the devolved authority to coordinate schoolwide governance changes, but have recently have turned to dramatic plans for changing classroom practice. The Kentucky pattern of focusing initially on schoolwide governance and accountability linked to schoolwide student performance targets followed by closer attention to classroom changes follows a framework proposed by Caldwell (1996) who describes a worldwide school reform as having 3 tracks: a) schoolwide governance and resource devolution, b) intense attention to classroom change linked to student performance targets, and c) self-management for schools, teachers, and students.

5. Standards-driven reform created a new form of school leadership and change process. The principal in these NA schools retained a strategic educational leadership purpose. While the principal's job was enlarged and made more complex as described by Murphy (1994), principals also were strategic educational planners who worked collaboratively using data to set student performance improvement targets and help the school plan backwards to redesign the school toward reaching those student performance targets. In contrast, Marsh and LeFever (1997) found that "excellent" principals in policy contexts featuring fuzzy student performance standards and weak devolution of authority to school sites often worked more as heroic individuals who sought to pull the school along with their individual vision. Marsh (1997) describes this new educational leadership style as an integration of a cultural/transformational view of leadership in a results-driven context and predicts 10 competencies that principals will need in the 21st century as leaders in results-driven schools

In short, the NA provides some important lessons for standards-driven reform, and especially the necessary and close link between common student performance standards and devolved authority to schools.

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